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A FIRST FLIGHT

ALEXANDRIA, March 14, 1919.

MY DEAR —

At last I have something worth writing about. I have been up in an aeroplane—it was very, very beautiful and gives me quite a new idea of my Alexandrine prison. E. is instructor at Aboukir for a little, and when I asked very diffidently whether he could take me he said, "Oh yes, of course, any time." It is perfectly extraordinary to have had the chance. On the whole it was less queer than I expected, and not alarming—I had not expected it to be alarming. You are not strapped in, but sit on a revolving music-stool, and are permitted and even disposed to get off it and look over the edge of the well in which the stool stands. E. sat in another little well in front, and by yelling into each other's ears we could talk. The start is queer and very impressive. You sit for a long time while the pilot exchanges a sort of mystic dialogue with two mechanics who do things to the engine. The propellers whir more and more violently, then stop, and at last the machine begins to wheel along the ground like a broken-down motor-car. It goes quicker and quicker, and you just don't know when you are in the air—there is no change of sensation—you might be going up a hill as the view extends: you feel perfectly secure, and never the least giddy.

The loveliness of the sea and land that morning I shall never forget. It was a new world. We flew over Montazah, then on to Alexandria over Irene's house. I had not told her I was going lest she worried. Houses are hideous—like teeth. I could see both the lakes—little Hadra and big Maryut—all the city with its double harbour, piers, and promontories, and the white limestone of the Western Desert beyond it; while southward out of sight stretched the Delta cut up into millions of little oblong fields, of which most were green and a few brown. The sea was of many colours, and where there were rocks it was as if a syringe from below was pumping white surf up at you. I must not forget the clouds, which though few and small, were charming, delicately tinted grey and purple and yellow, and casting shadows much more solid than themselves upon the sunlit earth. Our own shadow, following like a good little dog, was also visible when we traversed sand, and all sorts of unexpected things, e. g. cart tracks, came out distinctly. And was I never frightened? Yes, when we banked and when we came down—both perfectly safe operations, but odd ones. In banking (turning the machine) you don't feel you are toppling or on the slant—you almost wish you did, because instead you feel that the entire universe has gone mad. The sun bobs down, and the earth up, hanging with the whole of the sea in your right ear: you get used to it, and next second it is hanging in your left ear, and the sun is on the other side. At such moments I sat down with quiet dignity upon my music-stool. If I had shut my eyes I shouldn't have known anything was happening, for the equilibrium is perfectly preserved, but one wants to see as much as possible. It is by no means a terrible fright—as when a castor goes off a chair and you think it's the leg. Coming down is still less alarming—the earth sticks to her new trick, which is that of rising in your face like a plate of meat, and suddenly you are conscious of natives running right and left from you and shouting. Then you touch the ground as gently as you left it, the machine runs along for a little and stops.

I shall never have the chance of going again. It was that of a lifetime. I put in what I was afraid of in case you thought I was keeping things back. I was in a leather greatcoat, eared cap, and goggles. I thought my mouth would blow off sometimes. The noise was terrific, proceeding from the wind in the wires. My general impression is much more of what I saw than of what I felt—the immense amount of blue in sea and sky. The horizon is always at one's eye-level: if you come to think, this must be so until you saw the entire globe of the earth, which then and not till then would appear to sink beneath you.

Yours etc., M.
—National Review.